

Opinion

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Letters

Freeway 'divide and conquer' tact unwelcomed

Dear Editor:

I attended the Feb. 23 South Mountain Citizens Advisory Team Meeting (SMCAT) at the Komatke Center on the Gila Nation. This team is nearing the point to where they will recommend an alignment on the west side for South Mountain Loop 202. SMCAT was given the directive about 18 months ago from ADOT to start concentrating on the western section of this project for an alignment recommendation, then deciding the Pecos alignment later on. In my opinion, this was a divide and conquer strategy. Possibly the intent is once a west side route is selected the east section would be much easier to deliver.

I noticed at the last five meetings ADOT and Federal Highway Administration personnel (FHWA) are back sitting at the same table where SMCAT members sit. Many times during SMCAT meetings they ask questions and interact as members guiding and framing opinion on the entire body. During this

meeting I counted four FHWA and ADOT personnel sitting among the members. At a minimum it has the appearance of swaying opinion of what is supposed to be a citizens board.

With the SMCAT meeting process nearing the end, FHWA, HDR Engineering, MAG and ADOT are making presentations that will be used in the first Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for South Mountain Loop 202. At this meeting the presentation covered air quality. The presenter mostly dwelled on PM 10 (Particulate Matter, 10 microns across) which, for the most part, are very fine particles. The human hair is approximately 80-100 microns across making PM 10 microscopic. These and other pollutants enter the body and also enter our blood supply.

Other speakers touched on PM 2.5 (2.5 microns), which is mostly vehicle exhaust while also being a main component of the ever-increasing brown cloud.

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A brief discussion developed on Mobile Source Air Toxins (MSAT), with the main players being Benzene, 1,3-butadiene, Formaldehyde, Acetaldehyde and Acrolein. To sum up the final point of this presentation, even though these pollutants do exist in the air along highways the questions asked on this and other pollutants won't be answered in the South Mountain Loop 202 EIS. This is primarily because it isn't specifically required in the final report of the EIS,

sometimes falling into a gray area. If this is the case, I would think the EIS process is outdated or slanted to make it almost certain that most if not all EIS-required projects receive the EPA and FHWA stamp of approval.

Other members on the SMCAT board expressed

disbelief when they were told that Phoenix air is improving. One member asked, "then why does the brown cloud over Phoenix worsen annually." Other questions from SMCAT members were about air quality in schools and the other pollutants that won't be measured to answer questions from the public in this arena. Another SMCAT member asked, "Why can't ADOT monitor the air in Ahwatukee

schools" for the above-mentioned pollutants. The answer was, "Trying to tell where it (pollutants) is coming from and where it is going would be hard to do." I would think regardless of the difficulty this process offers it is a required investment for the children of Ahwatukee and our nation, especially with the incidence of asthma in children being two to four times what it was years ago.

Technically it is possible using available tools

to track the pollutants mentioned in this editorial. Being that schools will reside right alongside this proposed highway, with Ahwatukee being such a densely populated residential area with this commercial arterial running through, it would be a wise investment to answer all the air quality questions submitted for the South Mountain Loop 202 Environmental

Impact Statement.

If you agree with what is stated in this editorial, please contact your federal elected officials to ensure that all the questions will be answered in this South Mountain Loop 202 EIS.

David Folts

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